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Amechi N. Akwanya,
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Abstract: In his article "The Father's Power in Breitbach's *Report on Bruno* and Achebe's *A Man of the People*" Amechi N. Akwanya analyses Joseph Breitbach's *Report on Bruno* and Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* in order to lay bare the underlying processes of these texts. Undoubtedly the patterns of struggle in the two texts are political, but reading them in exclusively political terms has the consequence that the works are of no further interest once the putative political agenda is identified and described. Akwanya's analysis discloses shared features in the two texts published within two years of each other. In *Report on Bruno,* there is a democratic system, where the people have their say but in *A Man of the People* they are kept in the dark about what is really going on and are manipulated and abused by those in power. Their resemblance is at the level of symbolism and this is what Akwanya attempts to unlock using René Girard's theory of mimetic desire.

Amechi N. AKWANYA

The Father's Power in Breitbach's *Report on Bruno* and Achebe's *A Man of the People*

Among Chinua Achebe's major works, *A Man of the People* and *No Longer at Ease* have received the least critical attention: they are different from *Things Fall Apart, Arrow of God,* and *Anthills of the Savannah* in having a protagonist the sort of which Carol MacKay describes as a "constricted self" confronted on all hands by "social conventions and boundaries" (149). A Prufrockian protagonist and someone not "moved by a publicly determinable goal," *No Longer at Ease*'s protagonist Obi's strength is seen only in his refusal to be taken under wing by the various communities and interests that surround him, but he is unable on his own to find a goal to strive for, something that might be worth an effort (see Akwanya 79, 83). For their own part, the protagonists of the other major novels including *A Man of the People* are playing on the public stage in a socially significant way. All four are historical novels in the sense of giving the impression of filling in "the 'dark areas'" of history, that is, "those aspects about which the 'official' record has nothing to report" (Dannenberg 118). The resemblance to the "official record" as of "an authentic account of past events" (Kindt 141) is so strong in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* that they have often been read as history disguised only slightly. However, the protagonist of *A Man of the People* lacks the profile of those of the other three works because his role in the crisis is first and foremost that of witness. He gets involved in the action by allying himself to one of the participants and hence lacks the capacity to influence and give an orientation to the unfolding events and nothing that happens to him can have any bearing on the violent changes taking place. Joseph Breitbach's *Report on Bruno* is also historical, but in the sense of displacing official history. In the age of the Cold War, we have somewhere in Europe a monarchy playing a role in government which probably belongs to an age before World War I and thus the text would be an example of a "postmodernist historical novel" (Dannenberg 118). The aspect of "history" it shares with Achebe's works is that they tell the story of a convulsion of the kind associated with cultural revolutions.

In the article at hand I analyze Breitbach's *Report on Bruno* and Achebe's *A Man of the People*. The two texts are not only contemporary, but they also narrate a dangerous struggle for political power with grave physical injury for one of the two main characters in *A Man of the People* and death for his antagonist. Similarly, there is catastrophe for the two antagonists of Bruno in *Report on Bruno*, especially for Rysselgeert whom he pressures cruelly and relentlessly until he commits suicide. Both sequences also have major negative repercussions on the political system. So in these terms and with focus on "the logic there exposed, risked and satisfied" (Barthes 89), they are both political novels. Bernth Lindfors relates this perspective to the political turbulence in several newly independent African states from 1960 to 1966 some of which the Nigerian Army had been deployed to help to manage and in Nigeria itself which had been teetering on the brink of disintegration and civil war from 1963 onwards because of systemic political tensions. Having done a detailed study of political events taking place in these new nations throughout the period and considering Achebe's role at the time as the Director of External Broadcasting for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company, Lindfors concludes that "By ending with a coup, an event anticipated yet still unknown in Nigeria but familiar elsewhere in Africa, Achebe added a dimension of universality to his story. It was no longer merely a satire on Nigeria but a satire on the rest of independent Africa as well. If the coup had a special meaning for Nigeria in the mid-sixties, it also contained a relevant moral for other emerging African nations wracked by internal upheavals" (254).

For David Carroll, on the other hand, focusing on the contrasting attitudes and mindsets of the two main characters, Odili Samalu and Chief Nanga, the relationship between these two men is seen as "a strange blend of fascination and repulsion, [and] dramatically and colourfully defines the problems of public and private morality in a society which has lost sight of its past and looks to the future for material rewards" (256). In Lindfors's reading, *A Man of the People* "represents" the story of Nigeria in the mid-1960s, a representation which doubles as the story of Africa's experiment with self-rule, whereas Carroll considers that Samalu and Chief Nanga are representative figures through whom we see the conflict between private and public morality: there are apparently no rules and material rewards alone provide motivation. What can be said for certain is that the formatives or as Michael

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Riffaterre would say, the "generators" of discourse are political events and the conflicts are taking place on the political stage. On these grounds, however, a comparative study is unthinkable between *A Man of the People* and *Report on Bruno*: the extra-textual reference that has been made for the latter being Hitler and Nazi Germany and therefore to a past domain and to circumstances utterly dissimilar to those of *A Man of the People*. The two works are comparable only when read as self-subsisting texts and in terms of their shared features as literary texts. Hence there is significance in the shared pattern that they go back as far as possible in representation of a developing crisis and the ensuing cultural revolution to the actions and decisions and motivations of the key players using public tools and facilities and a public platform in pursuit of their own individual goals. Of the two key players, Odili and Bruno, the former, in his own eyes, is pursuing a rational course throughout while the latter lacks space to examine his own motives, but seems to be looking only one way — ahead — to his goals and desires and reflection is mostly in terms of how to attain these. But their actions are fundamentally symbolic since they are moved by forces they are not aware of, much less understand.

In structure there are similarities between the two works. The opening of *Report on Bruno* reveals that the cultural revolution has taken place. The seriousness of the situation is yet to dawn on the political leaders and the people and as often in such cases they enjoy the cultural revolution as a spectacle (on revolution as spectacle, see Lyotard 43). The narrator is not going to correct this: he is only meditative as the source of the upheaval is in his own house, the leader his grandchild for whose upbringing he is entirely responsible. He is exploring the history of this upbringing with an eye on the turning points where the emerging monster is glimpsed. It is a story that begins at the end and drops to the formative past and sequence of events that have led to the present. The narrative makes recourse to history as a "strategy of containment" (see Jameson) where the spectacular failure of the regime of a well-heeled aristocratic culture to produce the expected and desirable outcome is analyzed and the turning points identified. For Karin Doerr, the problem is for Bruno to have been "raised by two male figures, namely his grandfather and a private teacher, Rysselgeert" (164).

The change that occurs in *A Man of the People* is violent and cathartic, but the system remains untransformed and unredeemed. Chief Nanga and his colleagues have set up an unruly mob of thugs who turn upon them in a moment of confusion, killing some of them and creating a power vacuum which the military step in and fill. At best only an interregnum may occur before things go back to what they have always been. The narrative also reaches back into the past, but not primarily in search of understanding: it is to give full airing to an insight that there is something fundamentally at odds in the mores of the human community. Chief Nanga's disorderly behavior and the total lack of discipline in politics and governance are only a symptom of this deep-seated problem. The final movement of this narrative presents this situation in a language of figures: "I do honestly believe that in the fat-dripping, gummy, eat-and-let-eat regime just ended — a regime which inspired the common saying that a man could only be sure of what he had put away safely in his gut or, in language ever more suited to the times: 'you chop, me self I chop, palaver finish'; a regime in which you saw a fellow cursed in the morning for stealing a blind man's stick and later in the evening saw him again mounting the altar of the new shrine in the presence of all the people to whisper into the ear of the chief celebrant — in such a regime, I say, you died a good death if your life had inspired someone to come forward and shoot your murderer in the chest — without asking to be paid" (149). There is clearly something diseased in the social fabric. The regime is unprincipled and corrupt and one of its members is the "chief celebrant" where a common thief known and denounced by the people just hours earlier is able to mount the altar unchallenged by the same people who are now the worshippers. This is the morally bankrupt social environment alluded to in the opening paragraph: "No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. I have to admit this from the onset or else the story I'm going to tell will make no sense" (1)

This is the story of a self-serving politician and his colleagues running the government as if a private enterprise for their own profit. But in the telling of the story of Chief Nanga is the telling also the story of his people. He represents them in parliament, but he also represents as a projector of their habits of thought, their attitudes and values. Odili is judgmental here and throughout the

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narrative, but it is clear in the narrative that he is not fundamentally different from the people. For example, when Chief Nanga snatches Elsie from him just for a quick gratification, it does not take much for him to realize "that Elsie did not matter in the least. What mattered was that a man had treated me as no man had a right to treat another — not even if he was master and the other slave; and my manhood required that I make him pay for his insult in full measure. In flesh and blood terms I realized that I must go back, seek out Nanga's intended parlour-wife and give her the works, good and proper" (76). He can only think of hurting his former friend and benefactor in return by pulling off a sexual encounter with his intended in which the focus is the sexual act and the intention to wound Chief Nanga. Here the taking and throwing of blows is by the detour of a triangle and this is entirely Odili's internal map work: in Chief Nanga's sexual encounter with Elsie, Odili receives a blow and in the sexual encounter he has decided to stage with Nanga's intended "parlour-wife" he will return the blow. René Girard's theory of triangular mimesis is here turned inside out. Odili will go on to try and obtain the assistance of Nanga's relatives by deceit to further his design. This is one of his many moves in making of allies to assist in his enterprise, although these allies have no clue what he is doing. Similarly, he appropriates party funds in his keep to meet personal needs on the following grounds: "I had already decided privately to borrow the money from C.P.C. funds still in my hands. They were not likely to be needed soon, especially as the military regime had just abolished all political parties in the country and announced they would remain abolished 'until the situation became stabilized once again" (147). His tone here hardly suggests that he expects to pay this money back.

The opening paragraph and the closing one quoted above signify the present which enfold the narrative of which the incidents are in the past. Those parts are not narration at all but commentary and are directed at the reader. This narrator as an eyewitness has information to give that the narrative by itself cannot give, but he does not pretend to moral righteousness and is even-handed in presenting the facts of the narrative whether or not they favor him. It is therefore in tone and attitude that the narrators of *Report on Bruno* and *A Man of the People* differ. That of *Report on Bruno* no less than that of *A Man of the People* is involved in "autoaffection" and "self-authenticating dialogue" as D.N. Rodowick would put it (131). In Breitbach's work we are looking at an internal operation in which thought is produced as writing and writing is apparently disinterested. Achebe's work, on the other hand, stands alone among his major works as a possible model for his remark that the novelist's role is essentially a question of education and that the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration (*Hopes* 30).

Several problems arise if *A Man of the People* is read in this way and Odili is a medium for providing the needed re-education. The values he appears to endorse are those of Max's girlfriend who shoots dead his murderer "without asking to be paid" (149). A purely personal morality applied in social interaction need not raise issues in a work of art, but it certainly would in real life. A much more complex problem follows from the universal status accorded to art, with the work addressed potentially to anyone who can read: teaching by means of the novel necessarily restricts the audience and in this specific case reduces Odili to an effigy instead of an authentic novelistic persona, which he surely is in the narration. In Achebe's work, we have the story of a "man of the people": Chief Nanga is really not the focus of the narration and the focus is the story itself which encompasses Nanga, as well as everyone else in the narration and carries them along. It is his actions which help to bring about Odili's involvement. Because of Nanga the events of the story become Odili experiences and the narrative a telling of a personal experience. In *Report on Bruno*, the grandfather is narrating a personal experience, that is, the sense in the English translation, but Nancy Dorian tells us that the subjunctive featuring in reporting the speeches of the characters "indicates that second-hand report or inference forms the basis of whatever is expressed in it, not first-hand knowledge" (4). However, the focus is on Bruno and it is this individual's actions that give rise to the narration. The grandfather who has more than once been the minister of the interior is providing a 'report' on Bruno, whose actions have brought major disruptions to the social system. Only this former overseer of the police department who has followed Bruno's upbringing closely has the total picture in which struggle for power unveils a triangular relationship. Instead of power appearing as in the real world of politics as enablement to act in the public sphere or as a pure object of desire, disclosing a "simple straight line which joins subject and object" (Girard 295), it is interpersonal rivalry that becomes dominant and

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power is in part a trophy taken in sign of victory, but also something that had become desirable because of who had it in his possession.

According to Fredric Jameson a re-enactment of class struggle comprises the political project that renders narrative a "socially symbolic act" (20). In *A Man of the People,* Odili's expectation in joining Max's party is that it would offer something that was ideologically pure to set them morally in opposition to the corrupt practices of Nanga's party. That would have given the political campaign the character of class struggle. He is quickly disabused by Max of the idea of having a "clean fight" with Nanga's party (126). In this campaign, Max will use the familiar means of winning elections including buying of votes. The difference is that the ruling party can pay out more having access to unlimited financial resources accumulated through graft. In *Report on Bruno*, beside Rysselgeert whom he hates for other reasons, Bruno seems to have one sole enemy — that is his grandfather and uses anything he can lay hold of as a weapon. This includes his aristocratic pedigree and his privileged position, which he himself shares in and has taken full advantage of. It also includes the apparatuses of state. His denunciation of aristocratic titles and privilege in parliament is in large measure a performance with a keen eye on the audience or even audiences he is communicating to. The press observes on behalf of the public and the other parliamentary colleagues observe for themselves, but neither can see or hear what the grandfather sees and hears. Watching him perform in parliament as a deputy, he can only see a cruel and cunning demagogue. Bruno has become a past master in the art of addressing different messages by one and the same speech event, at one and the same time, to different audiences: "anyone who watched that session on television may perhaps remember that at first Bruno addressed himself exclusively to the Prime Minister; he continued to do so as, after virulently criticizing the latest conferment of titles, he expressed the hope that it would 'be the last.' But when he added that not merely the bestowal, but also the bearing of titles of nobility should be forbidden, supporting this demand with the reproof that the nobility were becoming just as devoid of any sense of honour and dignity as the decadent bourgeoisie – at this point he turned to the right, towards the seats occupied by my party, and looked at me maliciously. How this look was misconstrued! People thought Bruno was alluding to my part in the Princess J. affair" (8). Passages of this kind have led to interpretation of this work that Bruno's aim is simply the destruction of his grandfather out of pure hatred. Doerr writes that "Breitbach shows Bruno's unreasonable hatred and his desire to take revenge on the two most important people in his life. Bruno advances politically and then uses ruthlessly all means available in order to obtain a powerful position which enables him to destroy both Rysselgeert and his grandfather" (164-65).

Bruno's "hatred" and "desire" to take revenge on the two most important people in his life are unreasonable and impossible to fathom unless read against the backdrop of Girard's theory of mimetic desire. In a mimetic framework, hatred and revenge are not pure emotions: they are steps in the subject's drive towards his object. Rysselgeert and the grandfather are destroyed as rivals so that the prized object may be snatched away from their hands. The importance of these individuals in a mimetic relationship is having an object they confer limitless value on by having it in their possession. Relationships and motivations are somewhat more confused in *A Man of the People*. It is certainly hard to make out a class struggle or a struggle of modes of production. What it directly narrates is the "passionate immediacy" of a personal struggle between Chief Nanga and Odili going through a series of transformations of which the political stage provides opportunity for the often physical dealing and taking of blows that occupy narrative attention. Odili first decides to violate Elsie, Chief Nanga's intended second wife in revenge for his stealing his girlfriend, then, stumbling upon a political party in the making opportunistically takes to the political stage and Nanga becomes a political enemy. A final transformation occurs with the death of Chief Nanga, with which Edna ceases to be an object of contestation. Now she is desired for her own sake.

It is surprising that Edna who has been denied personhood in Odili's consciousness at the point when she first becomes an intentional object for him, but treated merely as a tool, is now desired for her own sake. Her figuring for a period of time in that consciousness as a means of returning an insult no man had a right to visit on another would probably have been an inconvenient truth for him to admit to Edna and it is not part of what would make sense to a reader following the story through. The resemblances of the relationships in *A Man of the People* to those in *Report on Bruno* are best

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seen in the light of mimetic desire. Here the hostility of the language of his vow to give Edna "the works good and proper" disguises even to his own consciousness a desire to imitate Nanga's desire for Edna. Undoubtedly, he had felt attracted to Edna the first time he had seen her as part of Chief Nanga's entourage on his visit to Anata Grammar School: "I edged quietly towards the journalist who seemed to know everyone in the party and whispered in his ear: 'Who is the young lady?' 'Ah,' he said, leaving his mouth wide open for a while as a danger signal. 'Make you no go near am-o. My hand no de for inside.' I told him I wasn't going near am-o; I merely asked who she was. 'The Minister no de introduce-am to anybody. So I think say na im girl-friend, or im cousin.' Then he confided: 'I done lookam, lookam, lookam sotay I tire. I no go tell you lie girls for this una part sabi fine-o. God Almighty!' I had also noticed that the Minister had skipped her when he had introduced his party to the teachers. I know it sounds silly, but I began to wonder what had happened to the Mrs Nanga of the scoutmastering days" (16).

Mrs Nanga comes to mind because if she does exist, then there is a possibility of a door opening to reach this beauty whose eyes have earlier met his, quickly to withdraw again since the Chief has noticed this very brief encounter (12). This is probably the point at which Odili's interest in the young lady is ignited, and with it the recognition of an obstacle. In terms of one particular incident following on another, the law of connectivity in narrative, so to speak, Odili's desire is posited by imitation of Nanga's, who becomes the "mediator" of Odili's desire in so far as the object is for all intents and purposes desired "for the value lent to it by the desire of another" (Ouzgane 115). But the journalist has signified not only that the way is barred, but also that any movement in that direction was likely to draw from Nanga a hostile reaction. A further complication is that Nanga, Odili's former school teacher, has recognized him at this very meeting and received him back as a long lost son inviting him to visit and offering mentorship. There is no acceptable way of overcoming the inhibition following this public display of goodwill and friendship until Chief Nanga transforms from a benefactor to an enemy: "the impulse toward the object is ultimately an impulse toward the mediator; in internal mediation this impulse is checked by the mediator himself since he desires, or perhaps possesses, the object" (Girard 299). This desire is probably displaced to the sub-conscious all the time that Nanga is a friend and benefactor, returning to consciousness to actively seek fulfilment with the incipient feeling that Nanga had treated him in a way no man has a right to treat another. Such is the transformation of Rysselgeert from a friend and mentor to a mortal enemy. The rivalry with the grandfather is older and he confesses as much after his grandfather opens his eyes to the dangers to which he exposes himself by consorting with prostitutes: "'You even know things like that,' he said full of admiration, adding that in the past he had also hated my always knowing all about everything, in fact my whole success in life had angered him. Now he was pleased about it" (70). The rivalry does become playful for a time after this confession, but restless and watchful. In all probability, what is admired here will ultimately weigh against the grandfather, as this kind of knowledge is a source of envy. One resents that the other "has been through everything" and "the general human desire for experience has been so glutted in him" (Righter 108). Significant changes in their relationship are beginning to be noticed, as in the following: "I soon sent him to bed; I wanted him to be alone with the fear of diseases which, not without some hesitation, I had given him. He came back from the door again and gave me a kiss. 'Grandfather, you're tops,' he said, and then he brought out the thing that was uppermost in his mind: there was no need to tell Rysselgeert about this adventure that reflected so little glory upon him" (70). One danger to beware of in meddling with prostitutes is disease and having made this clear to him the grandfather leaves him to his own thoughts. But Bruno can only think of it as the grandfather having won a round! The grandfather is "tops": "the transformations that occur in mimetic desire are experienced by the subject, but the mediator does not change. Hence, Nanga has remained the same person he was and only in the eyes of Odili is he transformed. Similarly, the desired object does not change, except in Odili's attitudes towards her. She is first a pure object of desire and then she becomes the scapegoat to pay for Nanga's perceived outrage against him, only to become finally an object desired as a marriage partner.

Bruno calling the grandfather "tops" also signifies a reconciliation after the declaration of hate in an earlier passage. In this kind of reconciliation, a third party is always needed who serves as a scapegoat and that scapegoat here is Rysselgeert (see Romero). He also scapegoats the grandfather

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for the deep disappointment he experiences with his own father. As a scapegoat, he is needed to take the beating for someone else's or even the subject's misdoings; at the same time, he must be cast out as a way of getting rid of those misdoings or the guilt of them. Both his scapegoats are ultimately cast out, Ryssselgeert through his suicide, the grandfather in being forced from power and he and his party portrayed as the malaise of the country. Scapegoating is a mimetic strategy Bruno exercises with unfailing instinct. His first exploit when we first meet him aged fourteen is where he sacrifices his tutor. His grandfather and chronicler is full of dismay at the devious way in which he attains this sacrifice: "I found it particularly bad that in addition he had utilized the tormenting of a dog to bring about the dismissal of his tutor" (9). The two go into a coolheaded analysis of the whole incident, and there is acknowledgement on Bruno's part that there had been a trap: "I told him. He hadn't let the tutor walk into the trap for my sake, but in order to get rid of him. 'He set it himself. But you're right, Grandfather, I can see that I played a dirty trick on him. But didn't he deserve it?'" (15).

In *Report on Bruno*, all the moral issues in mimetic desire are functioning fully. Such is the character's ruthlessness, cruel manipulation, and ready scapegoating where all that matters is achieving his desired goal. The rivalry which he feels towards his grandfather is blind and needs explaining in a child. His extremely violent temper is linked to his great-great-grandfather and his mother. In some way, his repellent traits are inherited. However, Jonathan Lee connects the child's rivalry to personality development as he moves through "narcissistic identifications with various visual images": "In modelling oneself on another, one is also modelling one's desires on those of the other, and the inevitable consequence of this is an aggressive rivalry between the child and the other for the object desired by the other. In this way, aggression directed towards others is found at the very centre of the *moi*'s structure" (40-41). In this case, Bruno's aggressive rivalry is easily explained as resulting from the grandfather's role as a dominant visual image for the child. However, what is at stake is not really the specific formative experiences of the particular individual but that mimetic desire and all that goes with it is a defining feature of human life and comes out into the open under the right conditions, especially with the emergence of a "mediator" of desire, needed for this mode of self-expression to become operational and hated for that same desire he exercises and mediates: "only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself for the secret admiration concealed by his hatred. In an effort to hide this desperate admiration from others, and from himself, he no longer wants to see in his mediator anything but an obstacle. The secondary role of the mediator thus becomes primary, concealing his original function of a model scrupulously imitated" (Girard 300). Thus it is essential for Bruno not just to drive his grandfather from office and his party from power, but to show that they are unworthy of these things. He therefore makes this important point in his speech in parliament that they are "devoid of any sense of honour and dignity as the decadent bourgeoisie" (7). His evidence, which he does not disclose to parliament because he is directing the particular point to his grandfather is "the foolish lie" the grandfather had told him to try and explain away his failure to shoot a boar that had presented itself to maximum advantage to him in a *battue* in order that the Soviet Ambassador may have the honor, as this hunt had been organized in his honor. That this lie should be irredeemable, render the grandfather totally dishonorable in his eyes, and be the cause of "all the subsequent disaster in its train" (214) is obviously because of the desperate need to conceal his function as a model. Every means available, including blackmail is justified in the eyes of this subject against his enemy. The only thing that may be ruled out is whatever may threaten possession of the desired object itself. This is also the case in *A Man of the People*, as in the scene following Nanga's night with Elsie where Odili formulates his rivalry with him in terms which project he himself as the wronged party, having no choice but to pay Nanga back in his own coin. Girard accounts for this change of attitude in the following terms: "in the quarrel which puts him in opposition to his rival, the subject reverses the logical and chronological order of desires in order to hide his imitation. He asserts that his own desire is prior to that of his rival; according to him, it is the mediator who is responsible for the rivalry. Everything that originates with this mediator is systematically belittled although still secretly desired. Now the mediator is a shrewd and diabolical enemy; he tries to rob the subject of his most prized possessions; he obstinately thwarts his most legitimate ambitions" (300).

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In Odili's case, there is no way to maintain that his desire for Edna is prior to Nanga's; his attitude is rather that Nanga has no business desiring Edna since Mrs Nanga exists. Nanga himself partially confirms the inappropriateness of this movement of desire, as he never introduces her in company. He probably does not know who to introduce her as. But Odili soon finds that although Mrs Nanga feels humiliated and full of a sense of ill usage by the prospect of a young and much better educated rival in the house, there is precious little she could do to forestall this. She will complain in private but put on a bold face in public: there is no question of taking a stand against her husband and thereby Odili's hopes to bring about a civil war within Nanga's household and stand back and watch is dashed. In a mimetic reading, clearly, Mrs Nanga was to function as a figure for scapegoating; she was to be both an *agent provocateur* and the scapegoat to take the retaliatory blows Odili had every reason to expect. With the failure of this attempt to scapegoat Mrs Nanga, the only way to bring Nanga to pay a prize for his misdeed is for Odili to take the fight to a stage where he would have to deal and take blows in his own body. In the event, he hardly has a chance to land a blow before he is put out of action by a much better equipped opponent.

In a political reading of *A Man of the People*, Odili is a sort of hero for having played a role in bringing down a corrupt regime and he can also be seen as an idealist for advocating a clean fight with the old and corrupt politicians. His standing is quite different in criticism based on Girard's theory of mimetic desire: the character is unsavory, just a little less so than Bruno. However, this reading works as long as the focus is on the characters who are making the key decisions and taking the key actions that influence the movement of the narrative. In the two texts these subjects are Odili and Bruno. In one sense, the story is about them, although Odili makes a gesture of disavowal early on yielding to Nanga, the man of the people, as the focal object. Both are what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call "desiring machines" which not only have productions of their own but also connect to other machines for productivity (8-9). Hence a mimetic account picks up the other characters in the narrative only as required in trying to put into effect the subject's desire. But since "every character (even secondary) is the hero of his own sequence" (Barthes 79), we should expect to be able to account for each as also in his or her own right a subject with a desire object. For instance, Edna is moved to help Odili when he is discovered at Chief Nanga's rally and savagely attacked by Nanga and his thugs. It does not seem there is any mimetic basis for this assistance. There is also a problem with respect to mediation. So far as the text goes and in so far as it is a "discursive circuit" and a "bounded" phenomenon (Kristeva 36-63), Nanga's desire is unmediated and it is difficult to establish what exactly the Grandfather's desire consists of, beyond trying to create a successor and heir out of a grandchild both of whose parents are social misfits. It is suggested, and tellingly by Bruno (159), that this old man's motivation in aspiring to wealth and power is provided by himself alone. But it is still possible that in telling the story of Bruno, unlike Odili, the grandfather has forgotten to tell his own: that he is in fact displaced from the narrative space by the pressure and dominance of Bruno there and that *Report on Bruno* is the story of a double triumph for a young man who succeeds first in displacing his grandfather from political power and secondly and finally displacing him from a theater where he is the one wielding the pen, who in humanistic theory is supposed to be in control.

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